



Borne from disaster: A design-build service learning project in response to the Joplin tornado

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Summary

In architecture curricula, professors frequently engage the community through design-build projects. Projects rarely couple the intervention of a disaster phenomenon within the constraints of a broadcast network television show. This narrative tells the story from one private liberal arts university intimately connected with an Ozark community in the aftermath of one of the worst tornado disasters in US history. On May 22, 2011, an EF5 multiple vortex tornado descended upon Joplin, Missouri. The students of Drury University designed and built a garden space honoring the volunteers who came to the aid of Joplin, Missouri, a community healing from the devastating blows of a tornado that destroyed over 2,000 buildings, 7,000 homes, and took 162 lives. The location was at ground zero in Cunningham Park where the tornado reached the highest known intensity.

While Joplin experienced the rescue, recovery, demolition, and rebirth, students arrived at a five-part master plan for Cunningham Park. The service learning project was the tribute, implemented under the constraints of the broadcast network television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (March 2008).

2012). The show negotiated to rebuild a neighborhood of seven houses in seven days and to restore Cunningham Park, the city's oldest park in the city.

Communities rarely anticipate a natural disaster or have experience with how to cope and heal. The Joplin design-build project was a unique situation where the community was recovering from an EF5 tornado and the television show afforded celebrity awareness to the people, community, and the ongoing need. In addition to the typical learning patterns of a design-build project with architecture students, new patterns of learning emerged. These new lessons can be applied and replicated in future disaster response design-build projects with compressed timeframes.

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